

Learn how to successfully sell your stories to parenting magazines.

**Cash in on Your Kids: Parenting Queries that Worked**

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# **Cash in on Your Kids: *Parenting Queries That Worked***

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## **Section 2: Crafting Your Query**

### **Do I need to mention in my query the experts I'll interview?**

You don't have to name names, but it's a good idea to give a few examples of the types of experts you plan on using. This shows the editor that you have a good understanding of the subject matter and you know where to go to find supporting information. For an article about childhood diabetes, you might say, "I'll interview a spokesperson from the American Diabetes Association and a pediatric endocrinologist." Wait until after you have the assignment to do the interviews. You can find experts by contacting the media relations departments at associations, universities, and hospitals. You also can search the Internet for the type of expert you want or peruse Amazon.com for books on the topic (then search the net for the author's contact information).

### **Should I include a real parent in my query? How do I find them?**

It's often a good idea to include an anecdote from a parent in your query. If your topic happens to be one that your neighbor can address, that's great! Even if she doesn't want to be quoted in the final article, it's okay to use her at the query stage. Once you have the assignment, you can track down a real parent who is willing to talk on the record.

Finding real parents can be a real pain. Start by letting your mom friends know that you need a source. If you belong to a moms group, send a message to all of the members. Post your request on Facebook or other social networking sites to find someone suitable. Finally, start an email group of "real mom" sources and send out an email blast to that group each time you need a source.

### **What is a "simultaneous query"? Should I do that?**

Just as it sounds, this phrase refers to sending the same idea to more than one magazine at a time. Many publications will mention in their guidelines "no simultaneous queries," and for good reason: If you send the article to *Parents* and they say yes, and then *Parenting* immediately responds that they would like you to write the same piece (oh, to have such problems!), you're in a pickle. Neither publication wants to hear that you've already sold the idea to a competitor, and chances are good that they'll never work with you again.

We often give a magazine 2-4 weeks to review a query, then follow up with a polite email that says something like, "Just checking to see if you're still

considering my query, '24 great things about having a baby.' I hope so! However, if I don't hear from you by [give them a date, maybe two more weeks], I'll be marketing the idea elsewhere. Thanks so much for your time. Best wishes, [Your Name]."

If an editor loves your idea but is still circulating it to other staffers for their opinions, she'll probably let you know. If you don't hear from her by the date you've mentioned, you're pretty safe emailing the idea to the next-greatest publication on your target list.

### **Will editors "steal" my ideas?**

Not likely. We hate to say it, but there are very few new ideas. Chances are that you're not the first writer to suggest a certain article, and you won't be the last.

However ... if you have a "scoop" on an unusual story that hasn't yet hit the national newspapers—say, the world's first 15-pound baby born without benefit of a C-section—you may want to be cautious. For instance, you needn't give up the family's full name and identifying information in your initial query. You can be a bit vague, by saying "an Alexandria, Virginia, family has faced this very challenge and I've already been in touch with them. They've agreed to share their story with your publication once I have a firm contract for this article." But truly, those situations are quite rare.

### **Will I get a formal contract when I'm assigned to write an article? How and when will I get paid?**

Local and regional publications usually don't use contracts. An "assignment outline" by email will give your story assignment, article due date, the word count, and how and when you'll be paid. You can send them an invoice that includes your name, address, phone number, email address, Social Security number, invoice date, article title, word count, and your fee when you've completed the story. Invoices don't need to be fancy: You can create one in a word processing program. Regional and local publications typically "pay on publication," which means soon after the article is published.

National publications definitely require contracts and will send them to you. It's wise to read them carefully or even have an attorney review contracts for you. *The ASJA Guide to Freelance Writing* (St. Martin's Griffin) includes a useful chapter on contracts. Kelly James-Enger's book *Six-Figure Freelancing* (Random House) also includes many contract tips—she's a former attorney! National magazines generally pay once your article is officially approved by their editor-in-chief, regardless of when they finally print the article (and

that could be more than a year from when you turn it in). You'll probably need to do at least one round of rewrites before your piece is approved, though, and payment can take several months, so be warned.

It's always a good idea to talk to a tax professional once you start earning money from freelance writing. Depending on how much you make in a year, you may be required to get a business license, file self-employment tax forms, and pay estimated quarterly taxes.

**Publication: *Parents***

**Writer: Jeannette Moninger**

**Words: 1,200 (including 2 sidebars)**

**Pay: \$2,100**

**Query: Tickling Your Toddler's Funny Bone**

This was a pitch for *Parents'* As They Grow section for children ages 12 months to 24 months of age. These Grow stories are the best place for new writers to break into *Parents* magazine. Although I had written for this editor before, I still provided a thorough overview of how I planned to research and write the story.

**Why this query sold:**

- It focused on a developmental milestone that all kids this age experience (exactly what most As They Grow stories do).
- It specifically told the editor which section I was pitching (an As They Grow for toddlers).
- By giving the editor subheads (like "The element of surprise"), I showed that I knew the Grow's format and that I had enough material to write 1,000 words on this topic.
- I offered two sidebar suggestions—one visual, one text—which showed that I'd studied the magazine and knew this is what the publication included with their Grow stories at that time.

Dear [Editor's First Name]:

There's something about hearing your baby's first laugh that sticks with you. But equally memorable is the first time your toddler's true humorous side comes out and she actually responds—hysterically—to a funny moment. Simple pleasures, like gentle tickling, still generate the giggles, but your child's ability to "get" the humor in various situations will grow as her cognitive and verbal skills mature.

My As They Grow article, "Tickling Your Toddler's Funny Bone," will educate readers about how a toddler's sense of humor develops, including what typically makes a toddler laugh and why.

For instance:

**The element of surprise.** The peek-a-boo game is one of the first instances when a child's humor emerges. The element of surprise—Mom's gone. Now she's back!—is a great way to bring on a baby's smile. Now your toddler can turn the table and play the game herself to elicit laughs from you. More TK. [TK is magazine lingo for "to come" and indicates that you'll add more information in the final story.]

**Absurd antics.** Toddlers are becoming familiar with the routine functions of specific objects, which is why they find it hilarious when their expectations are playfully challenged. Pretending a banana is a telephone or trying to don one of your child's shirts will have them in stitches. More TK.

**Getting physical.** Sometime soon after your child's first birthday, physical humor moves beyond the tactile, like tickling, to more slapstick-style visual humor (pretending that your child is too heavy for you to pick up). More TK.

**Wacky words.** As language comprehension develops, toddlers start to respond to verbal humor, particularly in forms such as rhyming and nonsense words (they're funny because of the way they sound, not because of what they mean). They'll also get a rise when you mislabel things (calling a shoe a shirt or calling the dog by the fish's name). More TK.

One sidebar, "Laugh Track," will feature quotes from parents who have used humor and laughter to diffuse tantrums or keep their kids entertained in certain situations (like the child is hurt or you're waiting in the checkout line). The second sidebar, "Silly Stuff," will feature products sure to send toddlers into fits of giggles. (Fisher Price has a Laugh and Learn line of toys. There's also Tickle Me Elmo, or the new one out is called T.M.X. Elmo. More TK.)

Thank you for considering this idea.

Best regards,

Jeannette Moninger  
Home phone  
Email address

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